Rewire Your Brain for Optimism: A 10-Minute Practice

5 MIN READ

JUN. 20, 2025

BY HEATHER HURLOCK

Discover how a simple neuroscience-backed visualization exercise can boost optimism, resilience, and longevity.

Optimism is defined as a general expectation that good things will happen, and that kind of mindset is one of the strongest psychological predictors of healthy longevity. People with a more optimistic outlook don't just feel better; **they live longer**, bounce back faster, and age more vibrantly.

We're not talking about toxic positivity; we're talking about sustaining focus on solutions, allowing for a full range of feelings and growth even through difficulty.

The Science of Optimism

In a large, longitudinal study conducted by researchers at Boston University School of Medicine and published in *PNAS*, women and men with the highest levels of optimism were significantly more likely to live past the age of 85. Optimism is associated with an **11–15% longer lifespan,** even after accounting for factors like depression, socioeconomic status, chronic illness, and health behaviors.

Another study published in the ***Journal of the American Geriatrics Society*** went deeper. Researchers analyzed more than 150,000 older adults and found that optimism was positively linked with healthy aging marker*s* like stronger grip strength and faster chair stand times, physical benchmarks of functional independence. These associations held even after adjusting for social integration, medical history, and

mood.

Translation: Optimists don't just live longer. They live *better* longer.

Why Optimism Adds Years to Your Life

Optimism isn't about naïveté. It's a practical mindset that fuels healthier choices and boosts resilience. Studies suggest that optimistic people are:

- **More proactive** about **preventive health measures**
- **Better at stress management**, which reduces **inflammatory load and cortisol** over time
- **More socially connected**, which is independently associated with **reduced mortality risk**
- **More likely to persevere** when faced with health setbacks or life changes

In short, they see a path forward and they take it.

The Exercise That Rewires Your Brain for Optimism

Optimism is a skill. And it can be trained.

One of the most well-researched and effective methods to boost optimism? A deceptively simple visualization and writing practice called Best Possible Self (BPS). Grounded in the science of positive psychology, this technique helps rewire your brain to expect and pursue better outcomes.

Step-by-Step: The Best Possible Self Practice

Set aside 10–20 minutes. Choose a quiet space where you can reflect without distraction.

1. **Visualize Your Best Future**
   Imagine yourself at a point in the future where everything has gone as well as it possibly could. You've worked hard, stayed true to your values, and things have unfolded in the most fulfilling way. What does that look like? Where are you? Who are you with? How do you feel?
2. **Write It Down in Detail**
   Spend 10–15 minutes writing about that future in vivid, specific terms. The act of writing helps crystallize your vision and strengthens the neural pathways that reinforce it.
3. **Add a Mental Rehearsal**
   After writing, take 5 minutes to close your eyes and imagine this best future unfolding, as if it's happening now. Feel the emotions. Picture the scenes. This mental imagery activates the same brain regions involved in real experiences.
4. **Repeat Weekly**
   For sustained benefits, revisit this practice once or twice a week. You can write about different areas of life, relationships, health, work, or purpose, or return to a central vision and refine it.

The Research Behind This Optimism Exercise

A 2023 randomized study in the ***Journal of Behavior Therapy and Experimental Psychiatry*** found that the Best Possible Self practice significantly increased:

- **Optimism**: Increased positive future expectancies and decreased negative future expectancies
- **Positive affect**: Increased feelings like inspiration, excitement, and contentment.

Surprisingly, simply imagining your best possible self worked just as well as imagining and writing it down, offering flexibility for how you apply the practice in real life. Whether you're more of a journaler or a visual thinker, or both, it works.

WHY IT WORKS:

The BPS exercise helps shift your *expectancy bias* the way your brain predicts the future. Instead of scanning for threats or disappointments, it begins to orient toward opportunity, growth, and possibility. That's more than just wishful thinking. It's a neuroplastic training for psychological resilience. Your literally rewiring your brain for a better future.

WHO BENEFITS MOST FROM THIS PRACTICE:

The Best Possible Self practice is especially helpful for anyone feeling stuck, uncertain, or overwhelmed. It's a powerful tool for those navigating major life transitions, whether that's entering midlife, shifting careers, or starting a new health journey. It also serves people who are ready to set more intentional goals or reconnect with a deeper sense of purpose. While widely used in well-being and coaching settings, this practice has also been integrated into clinical therapy for challenges like depression and even chronic pain, with promising, research-backed outcomes..

Set a timer and try this exercise this week. Notice what shifts, and repeat it twice to build momentum. **Let us know** what you discover.

*The information provided in this article is for educational and informational purposes only and is not intended as health, medical, or financial advice. Do not use this information to diagnose or treat any health condition. Always consult a qualified healthcare provider regarding any questions you may have about a medical condition or health objectives.****Read our disclaimers****.*

WRITTEN BY:



Heather Hurlock